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ABSTRACT

The guide introduces a method of identifying problems associated with rapid community growth; outlines several growth management options, and some challenges to be faced when attempting to influence related policy choices; and examines how people being impacted might cope more effectively. Part I, "Growth Impacts Assessment," provides an overview of rapid growth impacts, and introduces an impact assessment and management model. Part II, "Community Growth Management," identifies several alternatives for coping with rapid growth, and examines processes and prospects for influencing growth management decisions. Part III, "Coping with Rapid Community Growth," outlines several opportunities for citizens living in impacted communities to obtain more effective leverage in the public decision-making process. The section also suggests an important role for public agency professionals and appointive officials in growth impacts assessment and in the analysis of growth management options. (AH)

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Coping with Rapid Growth: a community perspective

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Many communities are being disrupted by rapid growth, and residents face drastic changes in their way of life.

Rapid community growth is generally the result of some type of new economic activity. Sources of impact include large-scale construction projects, such as nuclear and coal-fired energy plants, dams, oil ports, and naval bases. Other sources of community growth might be the development of new mining operations, irrigation systems, industrial plants, and destination-type recreation facilities. In addition, community growth occurs due to the in-migration of commuters working outside the community, retirees searching for a more pleasant environment, or persons seeking a different style of life.

The purposes of this publication are: (1) to introduce a method of identifying problems associated with rapid community growth; (2) to outline several growth management options—and some challenges to be faced when attempting to influence related policy choices; and (3) to examine how people being impacted might cope more effectively.[1] This publication is organized in three parts. Part I, **Growth Impacts Assessment,** provides an overview of rapid growth impacts, and introduces an impact assessment and management model. Part II, **Community Growth Management,** identifies several alternatives for coping with rapid growth, and examines processes and prospects for influencing growth management decisions. Part III, **Coping with Rapid Community Growth,** outlines several opportunities for citizens living in impacted communities to obtain more effective leverage in the public decision-making process. This section also suggests an important role for public agency professionals and appointive officials in growth impacts assessment and in the analysis of growth management options.

[1] These objectives address the first two steps of a five-step public policy education process outlined by Bruce Florea (1979). These steps are (1) identify the problem, (2) develop alternative solutions, (3) analyze consequences of the alternatives, (4) choose an alternative, and (5) evaluate.

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Part I. Growth Impacts Assessment

Benefits and Costs of Rapid Community Growth

Community growth is generally accompanied by two types of impacts—benefits and costs. It is interesting to note that the benefits tend to be well documented (in fact, promoted) to justify the new development, while the costs are played down or not mentioned at all. Usually emphasized as benefits are the number of new jobs, expanded payrolls, increased sales and commercial expansion, higher assessed valuation through new investment, and additional property tax revenues. On the other hand, recent studies indicate that the costs associated with growth may have been understated. These may include likely cost increases for additional local government services, possible increases in the local cost of living, and increased stress on citizens and their organizations.

A very important aspect of cost and benefit impacts is their distribution—over time, among local government units, and among people. For example, an impacted community may likely face the dilemma of immediate costs for school expansion and a lag in new tax receipts from the increased valuation. This lag is due to the time it takes for new property to get on the tax rolls. Such increased tax revenues may accrue to one particular school district where new construction is located, while other districts may bear an undue portion of the costs of new students and other public services. Within a jurisdiction, the increased cost of services demanded by new residents may be borne, perhaps, by all the people—including those on fixed incomes who may not benefit from the new jobs and payrolls.

Economic and fiscal benefits and costs may be accompanied by social impacts, such as more stress on individuals and organizations, or increased drug abuse and conflict within the community. Review of numerous environmental impact statements indicates that social impacts and related costs are often not mentioned at all, or they are only implied in a brief and often vague paragraph. Such understated costs associated with growth must be made explicit if communities are to cope with rapid growth in an informed manner.

Citizens and local officials can indeed influence some aspects of community growth, and in some cases, manage many of its impacts. Those implementing community growth management, however, need information and techniques if they are to identify and cope with associated economic, fiscal, and social impacts. Information and growth management techniques are needed if local leaders are to weigh the costs of growth against its benefits—and to develop policies that affect the distribution of those costs and benefits among people and local jurisdictions.

A Growth Impact Assessment and Management Model

One useful way of looking at community growth, its potential impacts, and options for its management is provided by a growth impact assessment and management model (Figure 1). Derived from an earlier social impact assessment model proposed by Cortese and Jones (1976), this model delineates a critical distinction between expected and actual impacts. It also emphasizes growth management options available to the local community for influencing the kinds of economic, fiscal, and social impacts that actually occur. The focus of this model, then, is on the *local community* and the way in which local leaders relate to the six components of the model.

The components of the growth impact assessment and management model and their interrelationships are as follows:

- **Outside forces** refer to the policies, needs, and perspectives determined outside the community that condition (1) the way in which the source of impact will affect the local community, and (2) its growth management options.
- **Source of impact** refers to the new project or growth disturbance being introduced into the community, such as those outlined earlier in this publication. Numerous economic, demographic, technological, social, and cultural characteristics will be associated with the source of impact as it enters a local setting.
- **Local setting** refers to the economic, demographic, technological, environmental, social, and cultural characteristics of the impacted community. These characteristics interact with characteristics associated with the source of impact, such as a new development, to determine expected impacts in the local community.

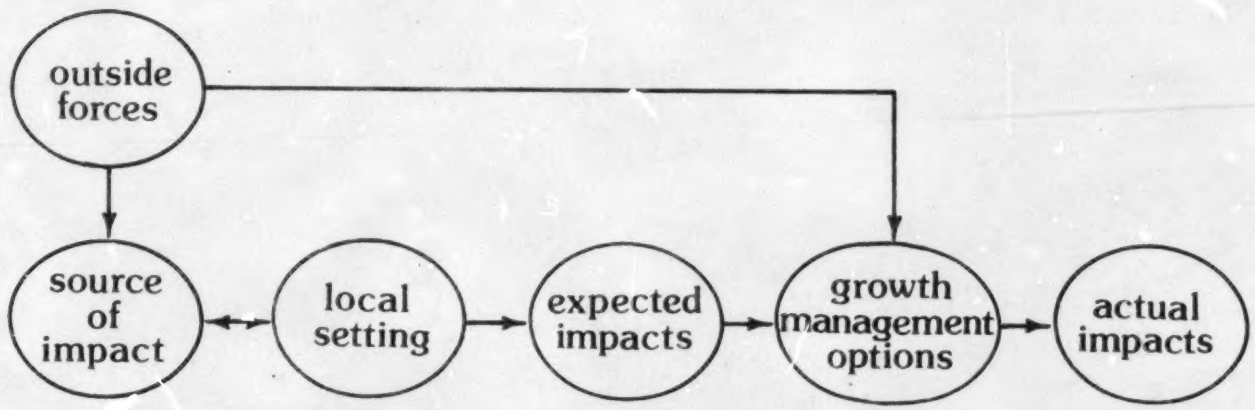


Figure 1. A growth impact assessment and management model and its components.

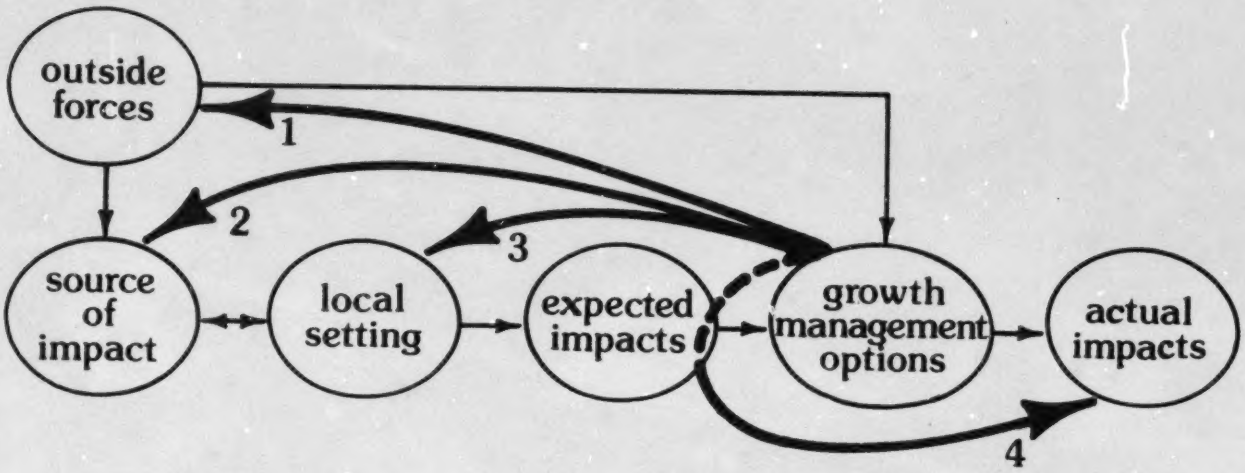


Figure 2. Four sets of growth management options suggested by the growth impact assessment and management model (Fig. 1).

- **Expected impacts** refer to the changes that may likely occur in a local setting, which is being impacted by a specific project or development, under existing policies and procedures for managing growth. Several categories of growth impacts can be anticipated—including economic, demographic, housing, fiscal, and social. *Economic impacts* include new jobs and expanded payrolls and sales in the community due to the source of impact, plus the investment in new plant facilities and/or new housing, and perhaps changes in the local cost of living. *Demographic impacts* include the size, composition, and distribution of the new population, as well as subsequent changes in local birth and death rates. Of particular concern is the number of school-age children and their distribution among school districts. *Housing impacts* will occur when the capacity of existing housing cannot meet the demand of an in-migrating population. These economic, demographic, and housing impacts lead to fiscal and social impacts. *Fiscal impacts* are changes in local government finance, including increases in tax revenues and public service costs, as well as their distribution—over time, among jurisdictions, and among population groups. *Social impacts* include increased stress on organizations and individuals and related problems. These kinds of benefits and costs —and their distribution—are some of the categories of expected growth impacts that can be assessed, predicted, and used as the basis for developing alternative growth management policies and procedures.

- **Growth management options** refer to alternative policies and procedures that people and their institutions can develop in response to the expected impacts of growth.

- **Actual impacts** refer to the actual economic, demographic, housing, fiscal, and social changes that ultimately occur due to the growth management option(s) implemented by the community as the source of impact interacts with the local setting.

In viewing growth impacts at the community level, one major concern is: Does the local setting have the capacity to absorb the source of impact? For example, if the local setting were able to provide most of the workers needed by a construction project or a new industry, then few new people would be drawn into the community. On the other hand, if very little of the needed labor force were available in the local setting, then a sizable portion of the new workers would either commute to work from outside the local area, or would migrate in as new residents. New residents require housing; if adequate housing is not available locally, a demand for new residential developments is created.

New residents often bring children of school age, putting pressure on existing school facilities, and perhaps even creating a need for additional classrooms. In addition, new residents and new housing place greater demands on nonschool facilities and services, such as police and fire protection, water, sewer and sanitation, streets and roads, recreation and library, health and hospital, etc. There are also problems associated with nongovernment organizations and services absorbing the new population, as well as the capability of existing residents to deal with people who might have different lifestyles and values.

By jointly analyzing the characteristics of the local community and the source of impact, it is possible to anticipate many of the impacts accompanying rapid community growth. Four sets of alternatives are outlined and discussed in detail in the following section, **Community Growth Management.** It should be emphasized that community decision makers choose either explicitly or by default from among these growth management options—with or without information about their consequences.

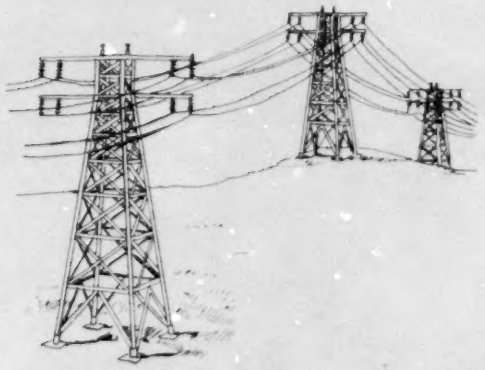
Part II. Community Growth Management

Options

The growth impact assessment and management model identifies four sets of options for local leaders to consider in a rapid growth situation. The different options, shown in Figure 2, can be used together or separately.

Option One refers to **political activity** initiated by local leaders. Using this approach, community leaders attempt to modify outside forces through state or federal action. An example of such a change is an amendment to federal law that now restricts supertanker travel on the Puget Sound. This legislation effectively limits the construction of an oil port in certain communities.

Option Two is for local community leaders to negotiate **front-end or preproject impact assistance,** to be provided by the private developer or government agency that is the source of impact. In the case of energy development in the state of Washington, the State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council provides a framework for the local community to negotiate with the group constructing an energy facility. The intent is to provide financial and other types of assistance to minimize fiscal lag and other impacts prior to and coinciding with the actual impact occurrence. Even without an enabling framework, there are opportunities for a community to negotiate with the source of impact. In the case of an industrial plant needing public services, the outcome of such negotiation may range from one extreme—in which the community grants a variety of generous tax and service concessions as an incentive encouraging the industrial prospect to locate in that community—to another extreme in which the community may insist that the industrial prospect meet environmental quality standards and pay all costs for public services extended to that site.



Option Three is to **change the local setting** by developing the planning, legislative, and administrative capacity necessary to achieve desirable impacts and to minimize expected undesirable impacts. For example, local governments can reduce public service costs of new residential development through land-use controls—such as zoning, the placement of new facilities (schools, water and sewer lines), urban service boundary guidelines, and other growth management techniques—and thus affect its location, density, and design. Local governments can also shift a higher share of added public service costs to new residents by requiring specified improvements (utilities, streets, etc.) and by increasing the connection and service charges for new residences.

Option Four would be to **take no action** and passively accept the impacts as they occur in the community. Some consequences of the passive option will be discussed later in this publication.

An active growth management strategy for citizens and local officials need not be limited to any one option, but might combine several different actions to change forces outside the community, acquire impact assistance, and change the local setting. A passive strategy, in contrast, would accept impacts by taking no action to influence their extent and distribution.

Incentives for Influencing Community Growth Decisions

In sorting out growth management options, the growth impact assessment and management model identifies three key points where efforts can affect the decision-making process. These are:

(1) decisions concerning outside forces made within *state and federal policy* development and administration arenas;

(2) decisions concerning impact assistance made during negotiations *between the local community and the source of impact;* and

(3) decisions made *within the local community* concerning growth management policies and procedures for implementation.

Whether at the local level, or in state and federal arenas, public officials make decisions on the basis of whatever information they have at the time a decision is required. Unless decision makers invest considerable time and effort into understanding and analyzing each issue, decisions on complex issues are reached with much uncertainty. Faced with making a decision, an official has to strike a balance between two types of costs. One includes the consequences of making an incorrect decision when not adequately informed; the other is expending the effort to obtain information necessary to make a correct decision. Given the pressure of making decisions on many diverse and complex issues, few public officials have the incentive to devote their time and analytical resources to becoming fully informed on any particular issue. Thus, each decision might be based on partial rather than complete information.

Bartlett (1973) has shown that, when faced with uncertainty due to the high cost of acquiring information about complex issues, the decision maker will generally be receptive to information provided by others. Persons having a stake in the outcome of the decision have an incentive to generate and supply more information than the decision makers can obtain without such assistance. It should be recognized, however, that some interest groups have greater incentives and capabilities than others for providing information.

Mancur Olson's (1971) analysis of the role of privileged and latent groups in decision making suggests that a key issue is whether incentives are sufficient for an individual, firm, or group to bear the costs of developing the information necessary for a favorable decision, as well as sustaining attempts to obtain that decision. The decision making arena generally includes parties that have either concentrated or diffused interests.

Concentrated interest refers to a situation in which the perceived benefits from a public decision accrue to a concentrated few, such that each individual's share is greater than his or her cost of influencing the decision. For example, an applicant proposing the expansion of a hospital has a strong incentive to provide

information favorable to project approval. In such situations, the applicant generally presents supporting information in the form of a professionally prepared statement, with expert witnesses available to testify at review committee hearings.

On the other hand, *diffused interest* refers to a situation in which the perceived benefits from a public decision are distributed among many, such that each individual's share of the benefit is less than his or her cost of influencing the decision. For example, consumers of health services often lack sufficient incentive to generate the information necessary to critique proposed health projects or to sustain a successful project-cost-containment effort. Each individual's share of any medical cost savings to be gained through project disapproval is quite small relative to the individual's cost of developing information needed to achieve those savings (Faas, 1977).

Such differential influence can be seen in decisions concerning community growth. When decisions are made concerning the spending of local public funds on the extension of public facilities to a new development, both concentrated and diffused interests are typically involved. Concentrated interests (such as industrialists and developers) who directly benefit from large capital improvement projects have strong incentives and thus generally attempt to influence public decisions by promoting information favorable to project approval. Information about the number of new jobs, expanded payrolls, increased sales and additional local tax revenues is effectively presented to decision makers through formal written statements and expert testimony at public hearings, as well as through more informal means.

The diffused interest side is more complex and is generally found to lack any well articulated statements about a proposed capital improvement project. Who is likely to challenge and critique the concentrated interests' presentation, which primarily emphasizes project benefits? Are there any individuals, firms, or groups with sufficient incentive to mount and sustain an effective counterargument? Such an argument might include documentation of higher public service costs due to the projects and their distribution among groups of people. Even in cases where total project costs exceed benefits, the "savings from project disapproval" may be diffused so widely that there is insufficient incentive for any individual, firm, or group to sacrifice the time and effort needed to affect project disapproval or modification. Thus, decision makers must often decide issues on the basis of information presented by the concentrated interests.

The above analysis does not necessarily mean that concentrated interests will always find public decision makers favorable to their cause. A well developed case, however, can be a powerful tool for influencing public decisions made under highly uncertain conditions. The important point is that concentrated interests have the incentive to use extensive resources to develop their case, while diffused interests generally do not have access to the resources needed to develop evidence in support of their point of view.

This analysis of who influences public decisions related to community growth has implications for the issue of controlled versus uncontrolled growth. It suggests that the relevant question is not "controlled" versus "uncontrolled," but rather *control by whom;* that is, control by people within the local community, or control by people who represent the source of impact or other forces outside the community. For example, the option to take no action concerning the extent and distribution of impacts may have considerable appeal to citizens who favor uncontrolled growth. However, this analysis suggests that one consequence of the passive growth management option would be the *de facto* transfer of control from within the community, to a source of impact whose representatives are well prepared and strongly motivated to influence decisions being made by local officials.

This framework has also identified some serious difficulties likely to occur when local residents facing undesirable effects of growth attempt to organize themselves and have their interests taken into account in the decision-making process. Typically, such groups find a great deal of difficulty in reaching a consensus about the nature of the problem, and as discussed above, they do not have the resources necessary for thoroughly researching the issue once a consensus has been reached.

These considerations emphasize the importance of careful attention to the four sets of growth management options outlined early in Part II—and judicious selection of opportunities for influencing decisions about rapid growth and its impacts.

Part III. Coping with Rapid Community Growth

Opportunities for More Effective Involvement

This section identifies several opportunities for those adversely impacted by rapid community growth to obtain more effective leverage in decision-making processes. When attempting to influence major public decisions with limited resources, the method of involvement is an important consideration in reducing the effort required to obtain and sustain effective leverage.

1. The environmental impact statement review process. One such opportunity for involvement concerns the information developed by the source of impact that will be used to influence public decisions. The National Environmental Policy Act and similar state environmental policy acts require that for specified projects, the source of impact must prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS). An EIS is intended to identify potential natural, economic, and social impacts of a proposed action, and to open for public review the decision-making process regarding a proposed project. Additionally, the EIS should weigh alternatives to the proposal, and evaluate the adverse effects that cannot be avoided. The EIS procedure requires the preparation

of a draft EIS and its circulation for comment 90 days before the proposed action. This is to assure adequate time for review by private citizens, community groups, and governmental agencies (Oregon State University Extension Service, 1977).

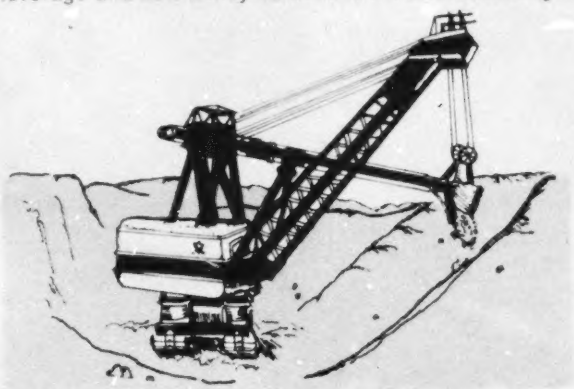
The EIS review process can provide an opportunity for citizens to learn more about expected impacts, and to develop alternatives which modify adverse impacts to acceptable levels. Given the incentive structure previously outlined, however, there is a tendency for the draft EIS (when prepared by concentrated interests) to emphasize project benefits and to understate or ignore adverse impacts. At a minimum, the process does provide a forum in which those exposed to adverse impacts may raise questions about the issues avoided or inadequately considered, and argue that such concerns should be analyzed in the final EIS and taken into account in public decisions. It is usually less costly to react to an impact document such as an EIS than to initiate an independent study.

2. Identification of community goals and growth management policies. Another strategic opportunity for involvement is the determination of community goals and growth management policies. It is paramount that persons who are vulnerable to adverse growth impacts have their interests reflected in such goals and policies. The crucial opportunities for input are to be found in the local comprehensive planning process, including the development of ordinances and other tools for implementing the comprehensive plan. Furthermore, by having different perspectives on an issue represented during the predecision fact-gathering process, broader community interests can be brought to bear in the evaluation of specific growth-related proposals. Such proposals may range from plans for new subdivisions and the expansion and siting of capital facilities, to smaller projects requiring variances to existing ordinances. If such practices are carried out, diverse interests will more likely be reflected both in the development and the implementation of community goals and growth management policies.

3. Negotiating front-end or preproject impact assistance. Another method of modifying the extent and distribution of growth impacts is to negotiate front-end or preproject assistance. Such assistance shifts part of the fiscal burden of rapid growth from the community to the source of impact. This method requires that the community identify and evaluate its own negotiating leverage.[2]

Leverage is the power of one party to grant or withhold something desired by another party. Only when each party controls something the other wants is it in their mutual interest to negotiate. The community must have some means of compelling the source of impact to recognize the need to negotiate. Negotiating leverage includes both the ability to compel the source of impact to deal with the community, and the ability to influence the design and scope of a project being developed by the source of impact, and thus minimize adverse impacts. Leverage can be formal or informal. *Formal (legal or institutionalized) leverage* includes land-use controls, permit controls, environmental impact statements, and the delivery of services, such as streets, sewer, and water. These measures give the community the opportunity to review the proposed development, to require information from the developer, and to attach conditions to a proposed project's approval. In essence, the formal measures make the community a body that must be dealt with by the source of impact.

Informal leverage can occur through publicity or other community practices, such as the prompt processing of permits. Informal leverage includes, at a minimum, the following: an awareness by the source of impact that a pleasant living environment helps to attract labor, reduce job turnover and foster worker productivity. The developer's desire to avoid administrative deyals in project startup is yet another form of informal leverage. The source of impact, on the other hand, also has leverage over the community, especially when the community is eager to have the development. In such cases, the developer will generally promise new jobs and an improved economy to a community—and threaten to locate the proposed development elsewhere if presented with too many obstacles. A community's negotiating strategy should include a systematic assessment of its need for impact assistance, and a clear understanding of its negotiating leverage and how it may be used to the best advantage.



Several means have been identified whereby local government officials can cope with rapid community growth—and impacted citizens can be more effectively involved in public decision making. These means include the preparation of information useful for assessing expected impacts, the identification of community goals and growth management policies, and negotiating impact assistance from developers and others who generate impacts.

While these processes do serve to facilitate the involvement of persons who are adversely affected by rapid growth, it should be re-emphasized that those likely to benefit from growth have strong incentives for involvement—and will try to influence public decisions. While these are timely opportunities for adversely impacted citizens to express their concerns, the processes, however, do not necessarily guarantee decisions in their favor.

Mobilization of Public Agency Resources

This overview of growth impacts in communities undergoing rapid changes, options for impact management, and contrasting incentives for different individuals and groups to influence public decision making, suggests a need for mobilizing local public agency resources through coordinated efforts. These efforts should be supported through educational assistance from institutions such as the Cooperative Extension Service.

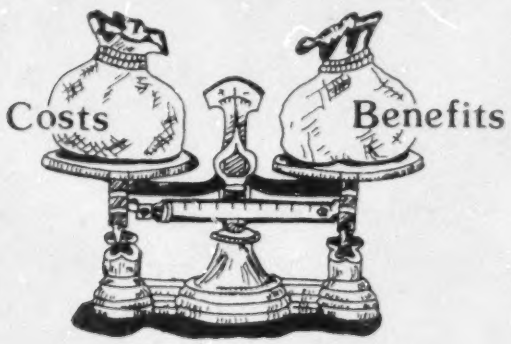
If communities are to cope effectively with rapid growth, local officials and citizens need to understand

[2] For a framework that can be helpful in setting up a process of negotiation between representatives of the source of impact and the local community, see U.S. Energy Research and Development Administration (1977).

the economic, fiscal, and social changes accompanying growth—and the distribution of those changes. Formidable constraints have been identified, however, which limit the amount of time and resources available for studying these issues by local elective officials and by the citizens adversely affected by the expected changes.

In most communities, some public agencies are also likely to be impacted by rapid growth. Included are the professional staffs of social service agencies, planning organizations, schools, hospitals, and other public agencies. These officials will be confronted by organizational stress while attempting to serve a clientele experiencing the economic, fiscal, and social pressures related to growth (see examples in Cortese and Jones, 1977).

Professionals serving in local public agencies have the responsibility to anticipate and respond to community growth impacts. They should be a source of assistance for diffused interests to examine and critically evaluate impact assessment information. They might also initiate and/or support requests for further analysis of issues inadequately addressed in preliminary environmental impact statements. These professionals also have opportunities to extend their base of concern and understanding of growth issues to appointive officials serving on advisory bodies, such as a planning commission or other committees or boards related to the provision of public services. Having an interest in the clientele served by their programs, appointive officials also have an incentive for concern about rapid growth and alternatives for coping with its impacts.



The prospect of rapid growth in a community challenges local citizens, their elective and appointive officials, and public agency professionals to influence community planning, decision making, and policy implementation regarding growth management. A situation of rapid community growth may be viewed both as a crisis and as an opportunity for the local community and its public agencies to work together toward the effective resolution of important public issues.

Summary

This overview of coping with rapid community growth has introduced a growth impact assessment and management model as an aid in identifying problems and generating ideas about alternative solutions. Growth management options were outlined, with an examination of how those public choices are often influenced, and by whom. Some difficulties likely for citizens attempting to influence growth management decisions were discussed. In addition, an analysis of some consequences of passive acceptance of growth impacts was presented. Several opportunities for gaining more effective leverage by citizens adversely impacted by rapid growth were suggested. Finally, a need was identified for public officials to coordinate impact assessment activities in local communities.

Rapid growth does present a strong challenge, particularly to persons who are likely to experience its negative effects. This publication has emphasized, by providing an overview of the problem and a general decision-making framework, that there are, indeed, means for citizens and officials in impacted communities to cope effectively. Many of the alternative means and analytical techniques introduced in this publication are examined in greater detail in other publications in the Western Rural Development Center "Coping with Growth" series.

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- Minimizing Public Costs of Residential Growth
- Citizen Involvement Strategies in Community Growth Issues
- Interagency Coordination and Rapid Community Growth
- The Public Policy Process: Its Role in Community Growth
- Economic Multipliers: Can a Rural Community Use Them?
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